



soul

## **MAMLECHET HACHAI: SOULS**

### **YOU MAY HAVE ALREADY LEARNED THAT THE TORAH TEACHES THAT ANIMALS HAVE A SOUL.**

- Can anyone help us to understand what the soul is? (One way to think about the soul is that it's the part of us that's *uniquely* created in the image of God, unlike anyone else in the world, that does what God wants us to do.)
- About 500 years ago, there were Jews who we call mystics, because their ideas about why and how the world works were very different from the way most people would think about things.
- They didn't think about things logically or scientifically.
- The way they thought about things didn't always follow from what common sense tells us about how the world works.
- Some of the mystics believed that after we die our souls live on in the bodies of animals.
- Now this was not a very popular idea among the great and wisest rabbis.
- Even the great Jewish thinkers who were not rabbis rejected this idea.
- The mystics believed that our souls continued on in the bodies of animals because this was how our souls got closer to God.
- If someone had done bad things in life, the soul would continue on after death in an animal's body to teach that person how to live more in the image of God.
- These mystics believed that, depending on how bad a person had been in life, the soul might inhabit several animal bodies before it became close to God.

### **NOW, IF WE BELIEVED THAT MANY ANIMALS AROUND US HAVE HUMAN SOULS, MIGHT WE TREAT THESE ANIMALS DIFFERENTLY?**

- Would we treat them better or worse?
- Would we kill them and eat them?

**IT WOULD SEEM THAT THIS IDEA OF HUMAN SOULS LIVING ON IN ANIMALS MIGHT LEAD US TO BE VEGETARIANS.**

- But the mystics had the opposite point of view.
- They believed that human souls in animals could be brought closer to God if they were eaten by human beings!
- If you thought cows and chickens had *human* souls, would you still want to eat them?
- But do you believe that after we die our souls continue on in animals?
- Neither does hardly anyone else!
- But would it make any difference to you if you really believed with all your heart that cows and chickens and other animals had *animal* souls?
- Would you still feel okay about eating them—and why?



**Gather the People**

<http://www.gatherthepeople.org>

© 2003 Moshe ben Asher & Khulda bat Sarah